

Holocaust distortion: from the Baltics and Europe to the US Congress

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On the eve of the 70th anniversary of D-Day (6 June 2014) and the 75th anniversary of the start of the Second World War (1 Sept), some American politicians have sadly been ensnared by the propaganda of antisemitic East European Holocaust revisionists. On 21 May, the House of Representatives passed, stuck on to a military appropriations bill, Amendment 134, Section 1266. It is rather a kind of moral support for European nationalists like in the Baltics, and has not much to do with the United States. This amendment distorts the Shoah and denies its uniqueness and unprecedented character which wiped out most of European Jewry. One part reads:

“(5) The extreme forms of totalitarian rule practiced by the Soviet Communist and Nazi regimes led to premeditated and vast crimes committed against millions of human beings and their basic and inalienable rights on a scale unseen before in history.”

This denies what Auschwitz stood for: the extermination of Jews because they were Jews. Nothing the like ever happened under Soviet rule. Not even vague equalization between the Shoah and Soviet crimes can be posited. To the contrary, it was the Red Army, not the US or British army, that liberated Auschwitz. It was the Soviet Union that provided refuge for those East European Jews who managed to flee in late June 1941, and it was the Soviet Union that liberated the tiny remnants alive in various parts of Eastern Europe in 1944 and 1945. It was the USSR that put up a gargantuan lonely struggle from 1941 to 1944 and that made D-Day possible.

The following point in the Congressional amendment is equally horrible and wrong:

“(6) Fleeing the Nazi and Soviet Communist crimes, hundreds of thousands of people sought and found refuge in the United States.”

This distorts the fact, again, that Germans and National Socialism tried to annihilate all Jews in Europe. The Soviet Union never ever tried to annihilate an entire population just because of its very existence. Jews were killed by the Germans (and their allies, particularly their enthusiastic nationalist East European allies behind the current amendments in the first place) because of their being Jews. Nothing the like happened in the Soviet Union.

Then, the congressional resolution goes one step further and equates Nazi Germany to postwar Soviet satellite state East Germany (the GDR):

“(7) August 23 would be an appropriate date to designate as ‘Black Ribbon Day’ to remember and never forget the terror millions of citizens in Central and Eastern Europe experienced for more than 40 years by ruthless military, economic, and political repression of the people through arbitrary executions, mass arrests, deportations, the suppression of free speech, confiscation of private property, and the destruction of cultural and moral identity and civil society, all of which deprived the vast majority of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe of their basic human rights and dignity, separating them from the democratic world by means of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall.”

Americans are known for their inability to understand what the term “deportation” means in discussions of the World War II era. When I spoke recently in Jerusalem about Jews being exiled by Stalin I did not use the word deported. That is

because that word implies, in the context of World War II the deportation to a list of some very specific destinations: Auschwitz, Sobibor, Treblinka, Babi Yar and all other places of extermination of the Jewish people.

To equate the Holocaust to the Berlin Wall is distorting the Holocaust in a major way and distorting the history of National Socialism. Using August 23 – the so called Hitler-Stalin pact – as a tool to deny the unprecedented crimes committed by Germans, is a symbol of the obsession of the self declared free world to distort the Shoah and to defame those who were at the forefront of fighting Nazi Germany: the Red Army of the Soviet Union. In addition to the Holocaust, Hitler's German-Austrian army rapidly murdered millions of Soviet citizens in addition to the Holocaust.

Many of those who collaborated with the German Nazis, like the OUN in Ukraine (Bandera and the Banderists), the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) or the Waffen SS legions in Estonia and Latvia are today portrayed as national heroes in these countries, to the stunning silence of the United States that seems willing to let its own vast wartime sacrifice be manipulated as long as the false rewriting of history serves today's short-term East-West politics (which are another matter entirely). [For more background, see a recent article by Dovid Katz in the Times of Israel about Ukraine.]

To compare the Soviet occupation of the Baltics to Nazi Germany, and to declare them implicitly or explicitly equal as in the recent Congressional resolution based on the East European far right's 2008 "Prague Declaration," constitutes yet another case of modern-day Holocaust distortion. I dealt with the Prague Declaration, Holocaust distortion and (German) secondary antisemitism – antisemitism because of and after Auschwitz – in recent years, both in English and German. To even mention the GDR in the context of the Shoah borders on Holocaust denial, as nothing *remotely* like the Shoah was ever inflicted upon citizens, foreigners or dissidents in the GDR.

I call upon fellow academics, particularly political scientists and historians, as well as human rights organizations, to wake up and stop abetting the new Holocaust denial that is based on East European nationalist proclamations of "equality" of Nazi and Soviet crimes. That such nonsense has crept unnoticed, and without public debate, into an American congressional resolution, is frankly alarming.

It is particularly alarming because many if not most scholars in Jewish Studies, Holocaust Studies, history, Nazi Germany, and related fields, are unable or unwilling to analyze and criticize Holocaust distortion.